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➤BOOK❖NOTICES.❖

ERMAN'S EGYPTIAN GRAMMAR.*

This little book marks an era in the study of Egyptian. Small as it is, in it there is presented for the first time a statement of Egyptian grammar that can be called in any degree complete. To go further, it might even be said that here we have for the first time a grammar of Egyptian. This may seem strange to the reader who knows that Egyptian has been before the world, and has been studied for nearly a century, but yet the fact stands so, and those few books which could in any way dispute the claim of this to be the first grammar of Egyptian are by the same author and mark the stages of his gradual advance, and of the gradual advance with him of the scientific study of the language. In 1878 appeared Dr. Erman's *Pluralbildung*, in 1880 his *Neuägyptische Grammatik*, in 1889 his *Sprache des Papyrus Westcar*, a masterly development of the grammatical phenomena of a text which was published a year later in an equally masterly edition.

In fact, the treatment of this one papyrus, with its photographic reproductions (only those who have had to do with such things know how much here depends on the care of the editor whether they are to be for ornament or to the purpose), its elaborate palæographic *Feststellung* of the text, its glossary and grammatical analysis with the special grammar mentioned above, would have sufficed to show that Egyptian had at last fallen into hands that were prepared to rescue it from the reproach of dilettantism which had so long clung to it. And now, in this grammar, we have the ripened fruits of Dr. Erman's studies, an elaborated and rounded scheme of Egyptian that, however incomplete it may still be, is miles in advance of anything attempted up till now. It may safely be said that there is not another man alive who could have written this book, and, probably, those who can wade through it without having their ideas upon Egyptian simply transformed, can be counted on the fingers. Outside of Dr. Erman's Egyptological school at Berlin and the two or three English students who are working upon his lines in London, this book might be a revelation to the so-called Egyptologists, a class in which there is probably more amateurism, unscholarly habits and simple humbug than in any other branch of orientalism—and that is saying a good deal. It *might* be a revelation to such men, but the probability is that for them it will pass unheeded, and we shall continue for a few years to have texts published by editors who could not translate them to save their lives, and learned treatises upon the Exodus or upon Joseph in Egypt by men who take as their guides Wilkinson's *Manners and Customs* and Brugsch's *Egypt under the Pharaohs*. In truth, it is hard to insist too much upon the difference between the two schools, that which Erman has been working some twenty years to found, and that which is represented by almost all the older Egyptologists. On the one

* EGYPTIAN GRAMMAR, with Table of Signs, Bibliography, Exercises for Reading and Glossary by Adolf Erman. Translated by James Henry Breasted. *Williams & Norgate*, 1894.

hand, we have conjecture and the treatment of the results of conjecture as ascertained facts, raised to a science; on the other, a resolute declinature to treat as fact what is not fact, and to go a step beyond what is firm and certain. On the one hand, again, an attempt to translate everything and anything though half the words are unknown and the construction a mystery, sometimes rising to the bold declaration that there is no such thing in Egyptian as construction, and that grammars are needless; and on the other, a recognition that where there is language there must be grammar, and that it is no disgrace to confess that a sentence or a whole document is unintelligible, that the disgrace rather lies in professing to translate what one does not understand.

From what has now been said, it will be evident that this book, though it is one of the *Porta linguarum orientalium*, yet stands upon a very different level from that occupied by the other volumes of the same series. They form more or less excellent introductions to the different oriental languages, containing nothing but the universally known and recognized elements, and their chief merit is that they embrace in a small bulk a grammar, chrestomathy and glossary, and a guide for further study in the sketch of literature. These advantages this book also has, and the beginner may start with it in the full confidence that he will find in it all that he needs for the first few months of study. But, besides that, this book is simply the most complete and accurate statement of Egyptian grammar that has yet been published, and there is probably not an Egyptologist alive who will not have to make it a desk-book for constant reference. Two prefaces, the one by the author, the other by the translator, and full tables of contents and abbreviations occupy pp. I.-XV. Then the Grammar begins. Introduction, Orthography and Phonetics pp. 1-28, Pronouns pp. 28-36, Nouns pp. 36-62, Verbs pp. 62-124, Particles pp. 124-138, the Sentence pp. 138-171. Then comes a most valuable table of signs with the latest determinations pp. 172-194, and Bibliography pp. 195-201. Then, on a separate pagination, the exercises for reading pp. 1*-41*, and a glossary, which excites the hope that the dictionary on which Dr. Erman is at work, may soon appear, pp. 42*-70*.

It is impossible to enter into all the points of interest which are raised by this little book, but it may well be asked how it happens that only now are we approaching a grammatical treatment of the language. The only answer is to refer to the tremendous difficulties involved, and these difficulties come under the two heads of the orthography and the history of the language. As to orthography, every one is familiar with the appearance of Egyptian hieroglyphics, but it is only recently that it has been thoroughly realized that these signs, with the exception of one or two doubtful endings, are exclusively consonantal and that the vowels are never indicated. In this respect Egyptian agrees with the other Semitic languages, only in it the non-writing of the vowels is much more rigorously carried out. Evidently that law of Semitic phonology which makes the consonants of primary and the vowels of very secondary importance, was here in full force.

Again, as to the history of the language, it should be remembered that the oldest monuments date back to, at least, 3000 B. C., and that it only became extinct with the last speakers of Coptic, two or three hundred years ago. It is in the services of the Coptic church, still read in this which may be called "modern" Egyptian, that we meet the last remains of the language of the builders of the Pyramids. This long history is divided into the following five periods:—I. Old

Egyptian, the language of the old Empire, found in its oldest form in the Pyramid texts, and continuing long as the language of the learned, though as unintelligible to the common people as are our Latin inscriptions. II. Middle Egyptian, the language of the people during the Middle Empire. III. Late Egyptian, the popular language during the New Empire. IV. Demotic, the popular language of the immediately pre-Christian centuries, written in a curious cursive development of the Hieratic character. V. Coptic, the language of the Christians in Egypt, written in Greek characters. It is difficult to overestimate the changes which a history of this length must have involved. Between Vergil and Dante there are only some thirteen centuries, and between Alfred the Great and Tennyson, not ten, but the ability to read the "Æneid" or the "Idylls of the King" does not by any means involve the ability to read the "Divina Commedia," or Alfred's translation of Boëtius. And when to that is added that only in Coptic, the last of the five developments, are the vowels indicated, it will be understood how almost hopeless is the attempt to gain any knowledge of the word structure of old Egyptian. Dr. Erman puts the matter thus in the *Vorrede* to his *Sprache des Papyrus Westcar*, a text which appears to fall between the Middle and the New Empire:—"Wir stehen daher den vocallos geschriebenen Formen der alten Sprache fast hülflos gegenüber und können nur schwer oder gar nicht uns ein Urtheil darüber bilden, wie viel vokalisch geschiedene Formen sich hinter den äusserlich gleichen Consonantengruppen verbergen. Um sich unsere Lage zu veranschaulichen, denke man sich dass wir vom Syrischen nur einige alte unvokalisirte Texte besässen und dass wir nun die Formenlehre derselben mit alleiniger Hülfe des heutigen Neusyrischen enträthseln müssten, das, ganz ähnlich wie das Koptische von der alten reichen Flexion nichts gerettet hat als den Imperativ, zwei Participien und einen Infinitiv." But the difficulty of the case might have been stated even more strongly, for while in Syriac we have letters of prolongation that would go far to indicate the forms, these in Egyptian are totally lacking.

The comparison here made between Egyptian and Syriac suggests the question of their linguistic relationships, and this question is answered without doubt or hesitation by the first sentence of the Grammar. "The Egyptian language is related to the Semitic languages (Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic, etc.), to the East African languages (Bishari, Galla, Somali, and others), and to the Berber languages of North Africa." Here we touch the second side of interest in this book. It is epoch making with regard to Egyptian, but it also marks the beginning of a new era in the study of comparative Semitic. Though Dr. Erman, apart from the above dogmatic statement, restrains himself in the most severe fashion from any dealing with these questions, it is principally due to him and his work that the place of Egyptian in the Semitic family can now be discussed without the risk of being regarded as a "crank" in the field of scholarship. Not many years ago that was the reputation that awaited the investigator—though in Egyptian where there were and are so many "cranks," that did not count for much—and it awaited him rightly, for our knowledge of Egyptian was not then upon such a basis of certainty, nor of such an extent as to facts, as to warrant any attempt at comparison with another language. But now, that is past, and though there is much that will have to be learned and unlearned, we have reached a position from which we can see how great is the part to be played by Egyptian in the study of the development of the Semitic group. That it is Semitic, no doubt now

remains and when Dr. Steindorff has completed his investigations into the sound-interchanges between Egyptian and Asiatic Semitic, we shall be able to compare the vocabularies of the two at length. But at the grammatical structure it is already possible to work, and it may be said without hesitation that the next great step in the study of comparative Semitic will be made through Egyptian. It will take us further back than we have yet been able to penetrate, and it will solve the riddle of the comparative values of Arabic and Hebrew as to primitiveness of form. Until recently it was imagined that we had in Arabic a tolerable representative of that mother tongue which lies behind the Semitic group, and Hebrew grammars, notably that of Olshausen, were written upon the principle of taking the Arabic form as representing the primitive, and from it deducing the Hebrew. This was an outcome of the position of the Dutch school of Arabists, and finds its parallel in the similar place once assigned to Sanscrit in the Indo-European group. But that passed, and it is coming to be slowly recognized that there are innumerable forms in Arabic which cannot be primitive, but are secondary in the highest degree; and, further, that the appearance of uniformity, which in Arabic is so striking and gives so strong an impression of originality, is due to a law of analogy working within this one language. Thus the pendulum has swung back and Hebrew has partly regained its place. The position of being the original language is not again claimed for it, but it may *possibly* be the most original in the Semitic group. The problem, then, was and is to decide how much in Arabic is primitive, and how much is due to analogy and changes in the language itself. To the solution of this problem Assyrian did not contribute as much as was expected. Perhaps its time has not yet come, but it may be said that students of Semitic are, from various causes, very chary of basing anything upon the evidence of Assyrian forms or texts. But now Egyptian has entered the field and has given promise of very different results. It stands very much farther removed from the other Semitic dialects than does Assyrian. The laws of the interchange of sounds show us that Assyrian is a close relative to Canaanite, and, as we now know through the Panammu inscription, to old Aramaic. But Egyptian stands altogether outside of the Asiatic group which forms a connected whole over against it. The combination of the two will take us behind the division, not only of Canaanite, Aramaic and Assyrian, or of North and South Arabic, but the division of North and South Semitic. Nay, it takes us even further than this, and promises to solve the problem of the North and East African languages. Into this it is impossible to enter, and many years must pass before, on that side, fixed results can be looked for, but it is curious to see the little group of languages called Semitic which were once regarded as being so sharply and decisively separated from all the other tongues of the earth, beginning to accept new members and to melt into an unknown haze.

But apart from the wider horizon which thus opens out, no one can work through this book without recognizing on almost every page the promise of the solution of one or another problem as to the origin of a form or of a construction. It is needless to enter into detail; no one who professes to study comparative Semitic can now afford to be ignorant of Egyptian, and those who, like Hommel in his examination of the Sibilants, have already begun the study, will be the leaders in the new movement. Like Hommel again, their theories may have been scoffed at, but it will be for the future to weed out the false from the true.

It is for the student of Semitic, then, to give his days and nights to the study of this grammar, and of the companion Coptic grammar by Dr. Steindorff, and thus, at last, to gain a basis for scientific comparative study. As a guide to this, Dr. Erman's article in Vol. XLVI. of the ZDMG., *Das Verhältniss des Aegyptischen zu den semitischen Sprachen*, sums up all that at present can be asserted with absolute confidence.

It remains only to say that the translation, with the exception of the author's preface, which must have been done very hurriedly at the last, is idiomatic and careful, written in English and not, as so often, in English German. Mr. Breasted is to be congratulated on his work.

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A CONCISE DICTIONARY OF THE ASSYRIAN LANGUAGE.*

The facts connected with the history of the decipherment of the Assyrian language have compelled every student of Assyriology to be his own lexicographer. Every earnest student has compiled "lists" of words for his own use. This was the only way in which he could hope to keep pace with the rapidly increasing vocabulary and the only means by which he could attain to approximate or scientific accuracy in the definition and derivation of words and in the syntactical constructions of the language. From this necessity the real student is not likely soon to be relieved. Heaps of clay tablets are now being exhumed in the orient, and several of our museums contain a wealth of material for future investigation that is far from exhausted. For the specialist it matters little whether a Lexicon appears or not. But the case is different with the average graduate student who wishes to gain a practical working knowledge of the language—sufficient to enable him to follow and appreciate the work of specialists and intelligently apply their conclusions in other fields. For beginners in Assyrian it would be a great gain if a suitable compendium of the lexical results already achieved were at hand. Up to the present no complete work of this nature has appeared. Edwin Norris' *Assyrian Dictionary*, Parts I.–III., appeared a quarter of a century ago. It remained incomplete. The advance made in the whole field of Assyriology since 1872 has deprived his pioneer work in Assyrian lexicography of its value except as an historical landmark. Prof. Friedrich Delitzsch began the publication of his *Assyrisches Wörterbuch* in 1887. This work is beyond the range of the ordinary student in the wealth of material which it offers, and in the learned discussions of difficult points which enrich it, as well as in price. Moreover, at the present rate of publication the end is afar off.† Pater Strassmaier's *Verzeichniss Assyrischen und Akkadischen Wörter*, one of the most indispensable works for advanced students, is, as its title implies, a catalogue of words with their contexts alphabetically arranged and without definition. The most important available lexical contributions have come to us in connection with the interpreta-

* A CONCISE DICTIONARY OF THE ASSYRIAN LANGUAGE (Assyrian-English-German), by W. Muss-Arnolt. Part I., 8°, pp. 64. To be completed in about 8 parts. 5s. each. Berlin: Reuther u. Richard, 1894.

† His smaller *Wörterbuch* is, however, rapidly coming from the press, and is well adapted to the needs of students. April 10.